

THE ORGANIZER

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Starbucks Workers Issue Management a Six Month Review

On a freezing but bright Minnesota morning, baristas gathered on the sidewalk in front of the Franklin and Nicollet Starbucks in Minneapolis. Mittens clutched the splintery handles of picket signs. The baristas started to chant, "Starbucks Union, here to stay; these lattes are union made!"

It was January 8th, 2009. Almost six months prior, in the first public action of the IWW Starbucks Workers Union in Minnesota, baristas at the Mall of America Starbucks had stopped work to protest the closure of 600 stores. A week earlier, one of the workers had been fired for discussing unionization with his peers. Despite the firing, the idea stuck, with baristas at the Franklin and Nicollet Starbucks soon joining their fellow workers at the Mall of America as public union members.

Almost six months later, the growth of the union was evident as workers from several Minneapolis locations came together to give Starbucks a "Big Review." Standing almost six feet tall, the "Review" was indeed "Big." Aside from the tongue-in-cheek wordplay, the action had special meaning for Starbucks workers. Normally, baristas wait for their six-month reviews nervously. If you have been sufficiently submissive, you may get a 30-cent raise. Most people aren't so lucky, getting 20 cents or less. Now things are different. As a union, workers have the opportunity to talk back. Over the last two weeks, the Twin Cities Starbucks Workers Union gathered input

from baristas locally and across the US through an online survey, scoring the company on a scale of 1-3 (the same as Starbucks own review system).

The results were not flattering for the bosses. Starbucks scored a dismal 0.6, with baristas alleging

tions of federal labor law with the National Labor Relations Board. Union baristas alleged a pattern of abuses, ranging from interrogation of workers for suspected union sympathies, to instructing supervisors to spy on the union, and disciplining workers for participating in the union. The charges are similar

to allegations brought against Starbucks by IWW baristas in New York City, where a federal ruling against Starbucks concluded a two-year legal battle between the coffee giant and union baristas.

Since the legal process takes time, Twin Cities baristas decided to take their message directly to management. After picketing for a few minutes, the workers began taking turns reading off a litany of grievances. "Poverty wages." "Inconsistent scheduling." "Racist hiring practices." "Union-busting." "Unfair disciplinary procedures." "Inconsistent scheduling." Workers told personal stories of sexual harassment by managers, bounced rent checks, and the thousand other invisible miseries endured by today's working class.

Heard on their own, the stories **continued on page 2**



illegal misconduct in many categories, such as equal opportunity hiring, treating coffee farmers with respect, paying decent wages, providing consistent scheduling, and respecting labor law.

Indeed, two days earlier, the IWW Starbucks Workers Union filed 11 charges encompassing 25 viola-

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THE ORGANIZER

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Twin Cities General
Membership Branch of the
Industrial Workers of the World.

*The IWW is a union for all
workers, dedicated to organizing
on the job for better conditions
today, and a world without
bosses tomorrow.*

*You are invited to contact the
Branch Secretary-Treasurer or
any Delegate listed below for
no-pressure conversations about
your issues on the job.*

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*Many of our members are
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will always honor requests for
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Editorial

What a new year. Most of the world is thrilled that Barack Obama is the new president of the United States. It is unlikely he'll be anywhere near as hostile to the interests of workers as President Bush was, but those who have watched his cabinet picks have noticed a disturbing continuity with the Clinton administration, during which period vicious anti-worker actions were taken, such as the signing of NAFTA. Workers cannot rely on Obama or 'friendly politicians' to fight for their rights.

And both here at home and around the world, workers are not waiting. In this issue there are stories on the amazing progress made by the Starbucks Workers Union of the IWW here in the Twin Cities and around the nation (and the world), on the rebellion in Greece, and on the efforts of Independent Cambodian unions to organize in the face of a desperate economic crisis. Not all the news is good, however, and we have also chosen to run the statement by the International Solidarity Commission of the IWW against the Israeli government and IDF's vicious and brutal bombing and attacks on the Gaza strip, where nearly 1,300 people have been murdered, almost 900 of whom were civilians.

This delicate issue arises regularly in the circles of the American Left, as elsewhere, and usually threatens to divide the working class. Some of us see condemnations of state murder of Palestinian civilians as a form of anti-semitism, while others feel that any defense of Israel constitutes a form of chauvinist Zionism. The ISC has taken pains to distinguish between its concerns with the rights of workers and civilians to be free from violence and murder without engaging in the anti-semitic rhetoric that often inflames and disguises the real issues. On that latter topic, those concerned with the issue of anti-semitism and the Left may be interested in reading a new pamphlet by April Johnson

titled "The past didn't go anywhere: Making resistance to antisemitism part of all of our movements," (endorsed by none other than Chris Crass!). It can be viewed and downloaded from the internet at <http://www.pinteleidyid.com/past/>

We have a lot of work to do comrades. Let us celebrate our victories, and gird ourselves for the battles ahead. They will be many, but if we remain faithful to our convictions and refuse to be divided, we will end victorious. As Errico Malatesta once stated, "Those who fall without compromise today, can be sure of victory tomorrow." Let's get to it.

Note: The Organizer welcomes letters to the editors. Please send letters to tc-organizer@riseup.net. We reserve the right to edit letters prior to publication.

— FW Errico Hedake

Six Month Review, continued from page 1

would be nothing more or less than disempowering tragedies. But taken together, it was all fuel for the fire. Even in the cold Minnesota morning, hearts began to warm with solidarity and a desire for justice. Confident in our solidarity, we took the six foot tall review to Starbucks area office in an corporate tower in Bloomington. When no one answered the door, we slipped the giant document under the door for management to find later.

Six months ago, the idea of a union for Starbucks workers, or of a "Review" for management would have seemed preposterous. Communication was one-way.

Now we have found our voice, and we're only getting louder.

*The Twin Cities SWU/IWW baristas
have begun a blog at
<http://tcsbuxunion.com/>. Check it
out! On December 6th of last year*

The Rebellion in Greece!

police shot and killed 16-year old Alexandras Grigoropoulos in the Exarcheia Square neighborhood of Athens, Greece. This neighborhood is famous for its status as a hang-out for radicals, immigrants, artists and outsiders – maybe like the West Bank in Minneapolis on a much bigger scale. Immediately the neighborhood erupted and confronted the police. Riots quickly spread to the Athens' suburbs, Thessaloniki (Greece's gritty second city), Crete and many other parts of Greece. The riots eventually transformed into a nation-wide and in fact international rebellion, lasting four weeks and involving solidarity actions in countries around the world. Far wabbles, the occupation by rank and file workers of labor union headquarters, in support of a call for a general strike, may be the most important event.

The main actions in the first days of the rebellion were confrontations with the police, attacks on police stations and capitalist & state symbols, and some looting. The street fighting has been extremely fierce, with molotov cocktails and

burning cars and buildings. The people in the streets at first were mainly radical youth especially from Greek's large militant anarchist movement and the radical student movement. During one of these battles, a poor woman's sales kiosk burned down. Because of the early date of her livelihood's destruction, the government has refused to assist her. Anarchists have since raised over \$18,000 and delivered to this woman, "who could be our mother."

The space created by the confrontation expanded both participation and the scope of the struggle: immigrants from Albania, Romania and Africa have joined in, and the ideological component of the rebellion became clearly working-class and anti-racist. An occupation movement began – several universities and high schools were occupied, as were municipal government buildings.

The Greek Communist Party (KKE) attempted to pacify the movement through physical actions to end occupations and calls for 'national unity.' A general strike was scaled back by reformist union leaders in an attempt to keep their membership away from the youth in the streets. Condemned the protesters in the streets, referring to them as "hooded rioters" that the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) were "patting...on the back." SYRIZA in turn accused the KKE of taking on "the role of the state's prosecutor." Direct action in the streets forced even the anticapital-

ist political parties to tip their hands a bit, often more than they would have liked.

In response to the scaleback of the general strike, the headquarters of Greece's main union federation was occupied by a group of workers in solidarity with the youth in the streets. Initial attempts by the bureaucrats and their "heavies" to re-take the HQ were thwarted by students marching over to defend the occupation. We should remember

that it was precisely the coalition between students and workers that sparked the worldwide rebellion of 1968 in Paris. All of these occupations began having open mass assemblies to make decisions about both the specific opposition and the broader struggle. A TV station was briefly occupied and the pro-

testers managed to actually broadcast a 5-min message urging viewers to "stop watching and join us in the streets". On the Acropolis, one of Greece's main cultural/tourist symbols, giant banners were hung urging the rest of Europe to take up the rebellion. International actions began, and the ruling capitalist press openly worried that the Greek infection could spread.

Greek fascists acted against the growing insurgency. The hardcore fascist organization Golden Dawn, allied with the fascist and white supremacist National Alliance in the U.S., mobilized its fighting core to attack rioters and assist police in arrests. They were photographed and videotaped openly carrying clubs and knives in groups as large as 50, in formation lines with the riot police. It's been said that the cop who killed Alexandros came from a family of fascist sympathizers and had in fact himself been a member of Golden Dawn.

The uprising has created a crisis on many levels for the Greek, European, and international ruling class. We all know that the international capitalist system is in a crisis of uncertain magnitude and that the system is incredibly vulnerable to a strong challenge. Early attempts by the PASOK (large mainstream socialist party) to use this to ride back into government are now being seen as insufficient to stem the revolt.

After decisions made by mass assemblies, the occupations of universities, municipal buildings, and labor offices were ended by the rebels themselves, with decisions made to spread the rebellion through a broader segment of the population than that which could actively participate in street battles. Since then protest marches on topics of education, and opposed to police violence have taken place. Police have been accused of violently attacking not only protesters, but also media and the press. In the protest against police brutality, some police labor unionists openly took part and issued their own statement against the attempt to solve social problems with repressive measures.

Greece has a long tradition of anticapitalist electoral parties, such as the KKE and the parties composing the SYRIZA. Anarchists have often been subsumed in subcultural identities such as punk. In one interview, one of the rebels identified their recent rejection of subcultural organizing as a major strength and one of the causes of the widespread appeal of the rebellion. It clearly led to a clear working-class and anticapitalist agenda on the part of the rebels, which became clear in the confrontation between rank-and-file workers and union bureaucrats.

The rebellion continues, and though it is now perhaps less 'spectacular,' it is vibrant and living, and a sign of hope.

– FWs Knutson and Davis



Independent Unionism in Cambodia

Facing Severe Challenges as the Garment Industry Takes a Hit

Chea Mony, the president of the Free Trade Union Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia, seems to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When I met with him, he was very tired, sick, and toward the end of a long day, and was preparing to write up yet another complaint against the owners of a garment factory. He took nearly an hour to talk with me about the experience of the union and Cambodian workers, and to discuss the possibility of furthering solidarity actions with the IWW.

FTU organizes across trades, but the majority of its members are in the garment factory. The FTU currently has over 30,000 enrolled members; approximately 85% of those workers are rural women who remit significant portions of their monthly salaries to relatives in the countryside. The World Bank estimated that these remittances improved the household incomes of 13% of rural households, a figure which represents the significant impact of the budding urban industrial economy in a country which remains overwhelmingly rural



and agrarian (71% of heads of household are primarily engaged in agricultural work, and over 80% live in the countryside).

Victories

2008 saw a few victories for the FTUWKC. A long planned action demanding garment industry-wide salary raises, from \$50 to \$56/month, was successful, though other issues, such as limits on seniority raises (limits which effectively freeze salaries for long-standing employees) were not effectively challenged. The FTUWKC has been the most successful union in the country in agitating for wage increases - starting originally from \$25/month in the late 1990s to the current wage of \$56. This success took place in the beginning of the year.

The most public success in the second half of the year took place immediately upon my arrival in country - the release of Sok Sam Oeurn and Born Samnang. Sam Oeurn and Samnang were the patsies arrested by the government and charged with the 2004 murder of FTUWKC president and exemplary labor militant Chea Vichea, the brother of current president Chea Mony. The FTUWKC, along with many other organizations, have been calling for their release since their original arrest, demanding the government search for the real killers.

On January 22nd of 2009, the fifth anniversary of the public execution style murder of Chea Vichea, Chea Mony joined hundreds of workers and political activists in a march and memorial to the site of the murder, where they held a brief ceremony to benefit the spirit of Chea Vichea, identified him as a Virajun (Hero) of the workers, and laid flowers.

Huge Challenges

In spite of these successes, 2008 cannot be described as a year of progress. Indeed, my discussion with union officers, and especially Chea Mony, left me deeply sobered and anxious about the future of the FTUWKC and the

union movement in Cambodia. These challenges are many, and daunting.

The worldwide economic crisis is the largest and most immediate threat

to the Cambodian worker: Cambodia's industrial workers have made their historic progress over the past fifteen years in part on the basis of a coordinated marketing push of sorts, in which the Cambodian government agreed to a labor law which was relatively favorable (in regional terms, generally miserable) to workers. This law has never been sufficiently enforced, despite monitoring work done by the International Labor Organization's Better Factories program. The beginnings of the global economic collapse currently ongoing will continue to exert pressure on manufacturers in Cambodia, who are certain to increase their pressure on Cambodian workers. The fallout thus far amounts to over 20 factories closed, and over 20,000 fired workers.

We are often told that crisis is a type of opportunity. This may be true, but the union's credibility is

also under attack. According to Chea Mony, the workers are losing faith in the ability of the union to effect change. This was a matter of deep concern and obvious personal distress on the part of Chea Mony. The most distressing example of this for Mony was the fact that the vast majority of organized workers - from 85%-90% - have stopped regularly paying dues. Overall membership continues to increase, but the rate of increase is considerably slower than in the past.

My ticket to Cambodia this year was paid for by a conference on Cambodia's economic development. That conference was full of people who have dedicated significant proportions of their professional lives to furthering the economic development of Cambodia, and most are not laboring under a delusion that Cambodia's situation is improving significantly, despite generalized improvement on basic health and security metrics. Still, I was not prepared by this conference for the level of distress that I encountered at the FTU offices. But Mony and the FTU are not encouraging defeatism. When I asked him what the workers needed to win in Cambodia, he replied,

"We need time. Maybe we need a long time. Right now we need money, enough money to survive on. If the workers can't eat and can't find housing, we won't be strong enough to strike, to resist, or to organize. If we can get enough to eat and live, we'll have enough strength to fight more effectively. If we can do this for ourselves, the workers will have more faith in the union. With enough faith in the union, we will be able to do anything. We also need a development law that is enforced.

"Why struggle? There's no other choice. If things are good, we struggle. If things are bad, we have to struggle more. There's no other options."

— FW Erik Davis

Moving the Evicted Back In, in Seattle

On Tuesday the 23rd I talked with Lee from Seattle's IWW branch about the Seattle Solidarity Network, a solidarity-based direct action group that win gains against bosses and landlords (www.seasol.org). Originally conceived as a way of building strike support, the ideas has been refined into an ongoing process of rebuilding Seattle's IWW branch and opening a separate line of struggle that can grow the size, experience, and victories of the militant portion of the working class. Talked about as something worth replicating here in the Twin Cities it seemed sensible to go to the source.

How does it work? The basic outline of their actions is as follows. Posters entitled "Problems with your Boss?" and "Problems with your Landlord?" are put up in intentionally working class neighborhoods and sites like bus stops and low income housing units, from which people call the network. Messages are listened to by an organizer who gets in touch with the person, ideally in person but often by phone. That organizer takes a report to an elected decision-maker who makes a call on getting involved, based on three primary questions: 1) Is there a clear goal and target? 2) Are those coming to us willing and ready to fight? and 3) Can we win?

Once an issue is taken on, ideally two organizers take on the role of bottom-liners for the network, and along those directly affected, are the decision-makers for the campaign. The first action on any issue is always the same, personally delivering a letter to the target to be pressured...with 10 to 30 network members in tow. While this is difficult to setup it is important for two reasons. First, it often wins then and there, building momentum and enthusiasm. Second, it creates a critical mass of people invested in taking the issue to victory, building the courage and understanding of participants because they have already taken action, felt what that feels like, understand the issue, and know the parties involved.

From there tactics are developed as appropriate with particular emphasis on direct action and economic pressure, and as you know wobblers can be pretty creative! Successes in SeaSol's first year of organizing include getting back stolen security deposits and unpaid wages, defeating a cover-up for an on the job injury, and a larger fight that went from getting apartments repaired to fighting a 2 day eviction notice and a building health code violation.

Definitely an exciting model! And one that has grown them from 5 or so original organizers to many more: 100 people getting emails for upcoming actions, 45 by phone, and 25 by text message. They also have monthly meeting attendance of 15 or so where decisions are made democratically by all present.

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International Solidarity Committee Resolution on Gaza

The International Solidarity Commission (ISC) of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) condemns in the strongest possible terms the military attack by the Israeli state and IDF on the 1.5 million Palestinian people living in the Gaza strip. This attack has included sustained indiscriminate aerial bombing of urban population centers, schools, mosques, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and injured, and homes have been destroyed. This attack is a form of collective punishment by the Israeli state against the people in Gaza. This attack on the people in Gaza is barbaric and represents an attack on the working class in all countries.

The ISC condemns the 18-month siege against the population in Gaza which has prevented food, electricity, medical supplies, and other basic necessities from reaching the people of Gaza and crippling the economy. This form of collective punishment against the people of Gaza is barbaric and represents an attack on the working class in all countries.

The ISC condemns rocket attacks fired into southern Israel by various factions in Gaza. These attacks have killed and injured Israeli civilians. This form of collective punishment against the people of southern Israel represents an attack on the working class in all countries.

The ISC recognizes the urgency and massive scale of the current attacks and mass murder against the people of Gaza by the Israeli state.

It is estimated that 850 Palestinians in Gaza and 13 Israelis have died so far.

The IWW is a revolutionary international industrial union that works to build unity of workers and working class people across all borders, occupations, industries, religions, races and nationalities. The IWW stands, and has always stood against all wars. Wars are caused by capitalist governments, and anti-working class leaders and movements, for the economic and political benefit of the ruling elites. We the working class are made to fight each other against our own interests.

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.

The working class have no borders. An injury to one is an injury to all.

The ISC extends our total and unflinching support to the people of Gaza and will work within and without the IWW to organize and mobilize support against this military aggression. The ISC will do all in our power to find ways to provide practical assistance to the people of Gaza.

We extend our hands of class solidarity to all our brothers and sisters in the region in occupied Palestine, Israel, and everywhere.

The ISC will continue to build links of solidarity across the region so that we may all help each other in our local struggles.

Only when we unite together, and shake off the chains of oppression and injustice that divide us from each other, can we build a world with no bosses and no masters.

All wars are bosses wars. Victory to the workers and people of the world!

—Anonymous F-Dub

Economic Crisis Action Group Holds Teach-In

On Saturday, November 22, the Twin Cities-based Economic Crisis Action Group (ECAG) put on the first of a series of series of actions and demonstrations targeted to respond to our current economic crisis. According to event organizers, around 60 people attended the event held at Walker Methodist Church between 2:00 pm and 4:00 pm that day.

In addition to getting the information out to the community, presenters also conveyed what the implications actually are for the most vulnerable members of our community. Larry Long sang "Livin' in a Rich Man's World" to start off the afternoon and one other song between the talk by Karen and the panel.

Karen Redleaf of the ECAG presented in again in more detail from the previous meeting earlier in the month how market speculators gambling on bundles of subprime mortgages. She also went in depth on how this then led to the bankruptcy of major commercial banking houses.

Redleaf is in the process of possibly developing an EXCO (Experimental College, a Free School in the Twin Cities) class to cover a "Part II" of her presentation.

St. Paul Public Cable Access, the Workers International/Socialist Appeal and the Freedom Road Socialist Organization all had a presence with information tables at the event. Refreshments were provided by Food Not Bombs.

Also according to event organizers, ACORN's Jeffrey Skrenes talked about how mortgage companies used predatory lending practices and sold the risky mortgages off to banks. As long as the housing market stayed "hot" and values increased, little attention was paid to the problems of that might happen with investments based on borrowers who may not be able to actually afford the property they were buying. Linden Gawboy on behalf of the Welfare Rights Committee talked about how the crash and resulting loss of revenue for the State of Minnesota.

Workers at the University of Minnesota had heard previously that the State of Minnesota was expecting a \$2 billion dollar shortfall.

According to Gawboy, it's looking more like \$4 billion for the year of 2009. ECAG plans a possible demonstration action involving US Bank in early December, but this could not be verified at press time.

— FW Michelle Rockne

SeaSol, continued from 5

Of course, as with all young or growing organizations there is much still in the works and being developed. Just as they have let their decision-making evolve over time to fit their changing needs, so what they can do changes with their capacity. The recent creation of a seven member organizing team that keeps in touch on a weekly basis to specifically build the organization is a hopeful sign of taking it to the next level. One of the key things being worked on is an orientation and training for the network both for people with issues and new members. Another is to figure out their exact organizational status as things develop. Currently they are separate but allied to the IWW, so as not to hit new people with too much at once but also given the probable legal restrictions on unions, like secondary boycotts.

The last major question is the need to consistently differentiate themselves from social service models of organizing both internally and externally—an ongoing challenge and victory. This is reflected in the active participation of those affected in collective action. This is not a service but a mutual struggle, and those who bring issues that are taken on are asked early on to commit to supporting others who face similar problems in the future. Moreover, no one is paid to participate, and the budget is kept to a minimal by having monthly meetings at a donated space, all other meetings at people's houses, while minimal printing and some gas costs are paid for by the IWW. Lastly, as the network grows those who have taken part in actions find that they, too, can be attacked by their class enemies and take their turn at calling upon the network for support.

All and all then, we have much to learn from the organizing going on in Seattle (as do they!) and their attempts to build a broad based working class movement from below

that is democratic, militant, without being distracted from issues centering around class and intersecting oppressions, not noisy neighbors or an annoying co-worker, for example. Questions of capacity are also important considerations for taking on such a model as the work is quite intensive, requires the ability to drop everyone and go, and as such is likely to be the sole organizing efforts of those who bottom-line the work, though we are not starting from nowhere thanks to the work of our fellow workers in Seattle, who offer us their posters, FAQ, and phone numbers, if they can be of use.

And who knows? If SeaSol gets big enough they might one day be a real force for supporting strikes as they initially envisioned; already they have found new workplace organizers, targets, and leaders. An injury to one is an injury to all—this is solidarity, and the Seattle Solidarity Network in practice.

— FW b



Upcoming Events.

The Union Movement in Haiti – Film & Speakers February 28 at 3:00 PM

IWW Solidarity Committee film documenting IWW delegation to Haiti. Mayday Books, 301 Cedar Ave

General Membership Branch Meeting March 3 at 7:00 PM

Monthly business meeting for the IWW Twin Cities General membership Branch. Come vote on where your dues are spent! All members have a vote. Mayday Books, 301 Cedar Ave

Delegate/Organizer Meeting Date and Time TDB

Monthly meeting to discuss organizing strategy and branch direction. Location TDB.